

I-94 NORTH-SOUTH CORRIDOR STUDY

Public Involvement Plan-----

Introduction

This Public Involvement Plan will guide WisDOT's public involvement program during the alternatives analysis/environmental review phase of the I-94 North-South Corridor Study. The Public Involvement Plan is multi-faceted to meet the needs of the diverse range of stakeholders on this important study.

Goals and Objectives

The objective of the public involvement program is to 1) solicit input on the study from the public and local and state officials; 2) feed the input into the alternatives analysis; and 3) inform the public, local and state officials, and the media of the:

- purpose and need for the project;
- alternatives analysis for reconstructing the interchange;
- impacts of the various alternatives; and
- study schedule and proposed overall project schedule.

The goal is to ensure availability of timely, accurate, and useful information to the public and local and state officials. The intended outcome is informed consent among the public and local and state officials on the preferred alternative for reconstruction of the I-94 North-South Corridor. Informed consent is defined, for purposes of this plan, as a consensus of support for an alternative that meets the project's purpose and need and acknowledgement by stakeholders that do not agree with the outcome that they got a fair shake and their concerns were considered.

Project Staff

WisDOT's Southeast (SE) Freeway Team will organize each of the public involvement events described below. Other SE Region and Office of Public Affairs staff complement the SE Freeway Team. SE Freeway design teams will also be involved in the public involvement program through participation at public information meetings (PIMs), advisory committee meetings and workshops. An effective public involvement program relies upon good communication between the design teams and the public involvement team and the entire team's recognition of the importance of soliciting and responding to public input.

Public Involvement Program

The following public involvement tools will be used during the alternative analysis/environmental analysis phase of the project.

Community Interviews

To identify important issues that need to be addressed during the study, the study team will meet with representatives of community, business, neighborhood and minority groups. The purpose of the community interviews is to introduce the WisDOT study team, describe the upcoming study, and ask participants:

- what they see as the key issues related to the I-94 in the study area;
- what types of information they would like to receive from WisDOT during the study; and
- what is the most effective way to convey that information.

Community interviews involve exchange of some project-related information but are really about process. The interviews typically involve a small number of leaders or representatives of a group rather than its entire membership. The community group briefings described on page 3 will include many of the same organizations but will include a wider membership of the group and focus more on project issues.

A partial list of community interviews includes [*to be brainstormed by PI Team*]:

Public Workshops, Information Meetings and Hearing

Public Information Meetings

A series of workshops and two rounds of open house public information meetings (PIMs) are planned. The workshops and PIMs are planned at multiple locations over several days. The workshops were held on January 28, 2006 in Racine County, February 2 in Kenosha County, February 7 in Oak Creek, and February 8 in Milwaukee. SE Freeway Team planners, roadway designers, traffic engineers and real estate specialists were on hand to listen to community concerns about the study-area freeway and to explore possible solutions. The public had an opportunity to sketch out alternatives for proposed

improvements on maps of the freeway. Approximately 540 people attended the four workshop sessions.

PIM 1 is planned for late May 2006, at locations in Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee Counties. Its purpose will be to introduce a range of alternatives the study team developed based on input received at the Jan/Feb workshop. The public will also have an opportunity to review and comment on existing and forecast future traffic conditions, existing crash data and existing deficiencies. After the PIM the SE Freeway Team will refine alternatives, eliminate others and perhaps develop new alternatives based on public input, cost, impacts, local government input, traffic operations, and safety.

PIM 2 is planned for November 2006, at locations in Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee. Its purpose will be to give the public an opportunity to comment on refined alternatives. After this PIM, the study team will again screen the remaining alternatives to the alternative that will be evaluated in detail in the environmental impact statement.

Public Hearing on Environmental Document

The study team will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to evaluate the impacts of this project. After the Draft EIS is approved a public hearing will be held to provide the public an opportunity to officially record their comments on the preferred alternative. The format will be “open house” or Georgia-style where the public can talk one-on-one with SE Freeway team members and submit written comments at or after the meeting or provide oral comments to a court reporter in a one-on-one setting. The hearing may be held at multiple locations, like the workshop and PIMs. The hearing is tentatively scheduled for November 2007, 22 months after study start-up. A pre-hearing briefing will be held the day of the hearing for WisDOT management and other WisDOT staff who will attend the hearing but are not part of WisDOT’s SE Freeway Team.

A third PIM may be held, if needed, after the Public Hearing in conjunction with the announcement of a preferred alternative.

Small Group Meetings

Property Owner Coordination

The study team will meet with adjacent property owners as needed to discuss property- or neighborhood-specific issues.

Community Group Briefings

The study team will meet with representatives of business, community, and neighborhood groups, city and county officials, and other stakeholders. The study team will provide briefings and updates during the course of the study, as requested, to local groups and organizations such as neighborhood, business, and civic groups. A PowerPoint presentation has been developed and will be modified and updated as appropriate for these meetings.

A partial list of community groups that SE Freeway Team will seek out opportunities to meet is included as Appendix A. The SE Freeway Team will meet with each of these groups before the first PIM, scheduled for late May 2006.

Elected Officials Briefings

A key element for a successful study is keeping public officials well informed of all study milestones. These meetings generally will be with 1 to 2 officials at one time rather than group meetings. A briefing packet has been prepared for elected officials.

The WisDOT Office of the Secretary arranges meetings with state-level elected officials (with support from SE Freeway Team as needed) and study team is responsible for briefing all city and county elected officials that represent the study area.

Two to three SE Freeway Team staff typically attends these meetings. The SE Freeway Team will coordinate with the WisDOT Office of Public Affairs regarding future legislative outreach as needed.

WisDOT has met with many elected officials. A list of elected officials meetings related to this study or SE Wisconsin freeways in general is included as Appendix B (*Dan Yeh's running list*)

Minority and Low-income Outreach

The SE Freeway Team will proactively seek out minority groups and request opportunities to meet. Meetings will generally be held at locations selected by the various organizations at times convenient for the community. It is anticipated that minority attendance at these meetings would be somewhat higher than for traditional Public Information Meetings. See the Environmental Justice Plan attached to this plan.

A team of outreach staff will work with minority residents who live in Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee Counties to make sure they are aware of the project and have an opportunity to provide input.

SE Freeway Team meetings with community groups in the City of Racine and City of Kenosha in 2005 indicated a need for outreach targeted specifically to those two communities. As a result Racine-based and Kenosha-based outreach specialists were added to the SE Freeway Team. These team members were selected because they are respected members of the Racine and Kenosha communities and maintain a network of community, neighborhood and minority groups. These team members will identify issues of concern to the community, solicit input from the community and help disseminate information about the study to the community.

Translations will be provided for Spanish speaking constituents both in newsletters, on the Web page and if an interpreter at events are requested?

Other Public Involvement Activities

Minority "Economic Opportunities" Outreach

Through outreach efforts to the minority community as part of the Marquette interchange project, it was learned that local minority owned businesses and individuals are interested in obtaining job opportunities related to the project's design and construction. WisDOT participated in two meetings with elected officials of the African American community to

discuss contracting and employment opportunities for minorities in the planning and development of the southeastern Wisconsin freeways. From these meetings, the decision was made to create a task force that would determine the appropriate level of minority involvement and develop a plan for the best approaches to use to achieve that level. The task force included study-area legislators, union representatives, workforce training representatives and WisDOT representatives.

WisDOT is working with legislators to form a similar committee for the I-94 North/South corridor project.

Grassroots Outreach

The study team's Milwaukee, Racine and Kenosha-based outreach specialists are developing a grassroots outreach plan. As part of this effort the SE Freeway Team will proactively engage neighborhood leaders and set up meetings with neighborhood residents. The focus will be on local communication and interaction through the study design and construction phase. Door-to-door outreach and literature drops in the densely populated neighborhoods will likely be included in the plan.

The SE Freeway Team will attend community festivals and seek out other events in Kenosha, Racine and Milwaukee Counties to distribute study information and answer questions.

The SE Freeway Team will staff a booth at the 2006, 2007 and 2008 Wisconsin State Fair and develop a "question log" to register visitor questions and comments and will compile comments in a summary at the completion of the fair.

Service Interchange Outreach

Several I-94 service interchanges in Kenosha and Racine Counties are moving into preliminary design phase of project development. WisDOT studied these interchanges in the mid-1990's and an Environmental Assessment/Finding of No Significant Impact was approved in 1996. Public involvement was a key part of that study. As the service interchanges move into preliminary design the design teams will conduct small group meetings with property owners adjacent to the service interchanges to discuss design-related issues. PIMs for the service interchanges will be held in conjunction with the corridor study PIMs in June and November 2006. The 1996 EA will be re-evaluated in 2006 but no hearing is required or planned for the service interchanges.

Newsletters and News Releases

Four newsletters will be prepared over the course of the study. The first newsletter was mailed in January 2006 to announce the workshop and kick off the study. A newsletter and news release will be issued prior to each PIM and the public hearing. The newsletters will typically contain updates on the study milestones, public input opportunities, schedule, and information contacts. The newsletters will be mailed to the study mailing list approximately 3 to 4 weeks prior to the PIMs. The study mailing list currently contains approximately 14,000 residents, businesses and organizations and will be updated throughout the study.

Mention translations?

Web Page

The SE Freeway Team developed a study-specific web site hosted by WisDOT's web page (www.dot.wisconsin.gov/projects/d2/i94). The SE Freeway Team is evaluating alternate web site addresses that are easier to remember. The web site includes pictures of the study-area freeway system, recent study developments, study schedule, maps, a summary of the need to reconstruct the study-area freeway and links to related sites. The web site will be updated prior to each key study milestone, such as PIMs and provide a user-friendly way to learn about study developments and e-mail the study team. All information presented on the web site will be reviewed and posted by WisDOT Office of Public Affairs.

E-mails announcing study information will also be sent to constituents who sign up for e-mail alerts through the Web site.

[This section will be updated following the team's discussion of MTP's December web site memo]

Media Outreach Program

The local television and radio news media has covered the two town hall meetings and workshop held near the Mitchell Interchange in late 2005 and early 2006.

The study team will utilize the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, *Racine Journal Times*, *Kenosha News* and community newspapers (*The Insider News*, *Waukegan News Sun*, *Daily Herald* – Northern Illinois, *CNI Newspaper* – Oak Creek, *El Conquistador*, and *The Courier*) to facilitate coverage of the study and PIMs. Press releases will be issued to all local media outlets prior to PIMs and other study milestones. Other media milestones will be used if available and appropriate.

John Oimoen and Bob Gutierrez are the media contacts for this study. All media requests should be referred to them. A member of the public involvement team will be assigned to work with reporters that attend public meetings to make sure they have accurate information and an opportunity to interview John Oimoen and/or Bob Gutierrez. Media and event opportunities for WisDOT's Secretary or perhaps the Governor will be investigated during the study.

A media event will be considered prior to PIM 1 or 2 to generate interest in the PIM and demonstrate the purpose and need for the project. As the purpose and need statement is developed through the first half of 2006 the SE Freeway Team will evaluate the effectiveness and feasibility of a media event.

A media/information source preference survey may be conducted. The timing of the survey will be considered during the study phase. Its possible the survey would not be conducted until the design phase.

Advisory Groups

Technical Advisory Group. A quarterly Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) meeting will be held with the SE Freeway Team, FHWA, SEWRPC, Illinois DOT, Illinois Tollway Authority, Racine County, Kenosha County, Milwaukee County and local governments adjacent to the I-94 corridor. The group's role will be to assist the SE Freeway Team in

developing and refining alternatives and selecting the preferred alternative. Six TAC meetings are planned during the study phase.

Project Advisory Committee. The Project Advisory Committee (PAC) will provide local input to the SE Freeway Team on a number of issues such as alternatives, traffic and access control, and environmental impacts. Six PAC meetings will be held during the study, with most meetings occurring prior to selection of the preferred alternative. The anticipated size of the PAC is 18 members consisting of local elected officials, neighborhood leaders, and representatives of community groups and business groups in the study corridor. WisDOT will solicit members to participate in the group.

Presentation of Technical Information

Effective communication of technical data to the general public is essential to achieving consensus on a recommended alternative for the reconstruction of the I-94 North-South Corridor. The clarity with which alternatives and other technical information are prepared can greatly improve the public's understanding of the process and subsequent proposal. The study team will develop computer-generated three-dimensional models of two alternatives. From these computer-generated models the team will develop three-dimensional views of the alternatives super-imposed on oblique aerial photos. Up to 12 views will be generated. In addition, drive-through simulations will be generated for the major roadway final alignments. The study team will also develop 'fly around' animations of the reconstructed Mitchell Interchange.

Beyond the technological tools at the Team's disposal, several guidelines are recommended for presenting technical data to the public. These guidelines are:

- *The study team must present consistent information to the public on study alternatives, events, timeframe and costs. Once recommendations or other decisions are made, the team must present that information with a single voice.*

Bob Gutierrez and John Oimoen are the primary points of contact for the media but many SE Freeway Team members represent the team at public meetings. All members of that team must provide accurate and consistent information to the public.

This will be accomplished through updates at SE Freeway Team progress meetings and e-mails to the study team. Brief study team meetings prior to all PIMs and the hearing will also help the study team provide a consistent message.

- *The study team needs to help stakeholders understand key engineering and construction terms and procedures.*

There is a need to clarify incorrect perceptions regarding basic construction concepts and what can be done to minimize/mitigate impacts. Although these are obvious to the study team and other transportation professionals, design concepts need to be defined in such a way as to be understandable to the public without being condescending. The newsletters and meeting handouts will be the forums for providing this information.

- *The study team should present complex analysis in a manner that is easily understandable by the public.*

There are a number of technical elements in this study that will be difficult to communicate succinctly to the public. Graphic techniques such as the three-dimensional exhibits described above will facilitate this communication. Another example is traffic modeling software output that illustrates traffic modeling conclusions.

- *The study team must clearly and carefully communicate information about controversial elements of the study.*

Controversial issues such as the relocation of the right-of-way acquisition, and potential relocations will be major public concerns. The study team must be able to convey the status of these issues (are the rumors accurate or not?), the impact of the actions, and potential mitigation strategies.

Presenting clear and consistent information in a timely manner is critical.

Schedule

Major tasks and milestones are illustrated on the study schedule. The 30-month study began in January 2006, and will culminate with issuance of a Record of Decision in June 2008.

Early on, the study team will focus on developing alternatives, gathering data, and meeting with stakeholders and the public. As the study progresses, alternatives will be narrowed based on public input, cost, and engineering and environmental factors. Environmental impact of those alternatives will then begin in earnest.

At the conclusion of the study, a single alternative will be selected as the recommended alternative to be advanced into the design phase and the environmental review process will be completed. The recommended alternative will be documented in the Final EIS and Record of Decision.

Incorporating Public Input and Measuring Performance

Incorporating Public Input

The SE Freeway public involvement team is responsible for capturing input from all public involvement activities and presenting the input to the study management team and design teams. The “raw data” will be made available for review by the appropriate design teams and a summary of the PIM and hearing input will be made available to the entire team. The study management team will review all of the comments submitted to the team rather than relying on a summary.

Design teams will document modifications to alternatives that are made based on public input. This information will be conveyed back to the public at subsequent public meetings. As an example, at the January/February 2006 workshops the public was invited to draw or write on maps of the study-area freeway system to illustrate their comments, concerns and suggestions for improvement. After the last of the four workshops the study team reviewed each map. Several design ideas and comments written on the maps will be reflected in the preliminary range of alternatives presented at PIM 1, including:

- smoothing out the Plainfield Curve;
- re-build the Airport Spur as a landscaped boulevard;
-
- acquire little or no right-of-way; and
- protect Falk Park.

Measuring Effectiveness

The effectiveness of a public involvement program during the study phase of project development is difficult to measure. The SE Freeway Team has the dual responsibility of soliciting information and disseminating information during this phase so effectiveness cannot be measured solely by how many people hear about the study.

Indicators of a successful study phase public involvement program are informed consent of the community for an alternative that meets the purpose and need for the project. This will be measured qualitatively based on the study team members' interaction with the public during the study.

As noted on page 2, one purpose of the community interviews is to ask stakeholders what information they would like to have and how they would like to receive that information. Questions asked by the public will help inform the SE Freeway Team of the types of information that the community would like to receive.

The SE Freeway Team members will solicit informal feedback on the PI program at small group meetings and at PIMs. This information will be conveyed to the public involvement team who will implement changes to the public involvement program if needed. The public involvement plan will be updated as needed throughout the study to reflect changes in the public involvement program.